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WILLIAM PITT.

Pitt, WILLIAM, the second son of the great Earl of Chatham and of Lady Hester Grenville, was born at Hayes, near Bromley, in Kent, on 28th May 1759. At the time of his birth his father was still in the House of Commons and in the very zenith of his fame, and the future statesman grew up amid associations and surroundings that were well fitted to foster that political ambition which was to be the guiding and almost the sole impulse of his life. His constitution in boyhood seemed very weak; he was never sent to school, but his education advanced so rapidly under a private tutor, that he was able to enter Cambridge when only fourteen. He was then a shy, reserved boy of exceedingly precocious talents, of irreproachable morals, and of regular and studious habits, little drawn to college society and amusements, and already distinguished by a rare self-control and concentration of purpose. From his earliest youth political life was placed before him as his ideal, and all his studies converged to that end. He became an excellent classical scholar, but he valued the classical writers mainly as a school of language and of taste; and it was observed how carefully he analysed their styles, noted down every just or forcible expression, and compared the opposite speeches on the same subject, observing how each speaker met or evaded the arguments of his opponent. Like many others he found in Locke a great master of clear and accurate thinking. His father superintended his studies with much care, and it was remembered that he specially recommended to him the sermons of Barrow as models of style and reasoning, and the histories of Polybius and Thucydides as fountains of political wisdom; that he taught him elocution by making him declaim the grandest poetry in Shakespeare and the speeches of the

fallen angels in the *Paradise Lost;* and that he exercised him in fluency by accustoming him to translate into flowing English long passages from the classical writers. To this last practice Pitt largely ascribed that amazing command of choice and accurate English in which he surpassed all his contemporaries. When little more than a boy he was an attentive and discriminating listener to the debates in parliament. He became thoroughly familiar with the matchless eloquence of his father, and together with his brother-in-law, Lord Mahon, he supported his father into the House of Lords on the 7th April 1778 on that memorable occasion when Chatham delivered his last speech against the surrender of America, and fell down, stricken by mortal illness, on the floor of the House.

Pitt was left with a patrimony of less than £300 a year. He was called to the bar in the June of 1780, and went on the Western Circuit, but in September parliament was dissolved, and he at once threw himself into politics. He stood for Cambridge University, but found himself at the bottom of the poll; his disappointment, however, was speedily allayed, for Sir James Lowther gave him a seat for his pocket-borough of Appleby, and Pitt entered the House of Commons on 23d January 1781.

He came into the House bearing a name which was beyond all others revered by Englishmen, with the advantage of being in no way mixed up with the calamitous American war, and with talents that had already acquired an extraordinary maturity. The Tory ministry of Lord North was then tottering to its fall, crushed by the disasters in America, and confronted by an opposition which consisted of the Old Whigs who followed Rockingham, among whom Fox and Burke were conspicuous, and of a smaller body who had been especially attached to the fortunes of Chatham, and who were chiefly represented by Shelburne, Camden, and Barré. Pitt lost no time in throwing himself into the fray. He spoke on the 26th February with brilliant success in defence of Burke's Bill for Economical Reform, and on several successive occasions he assailed the falling ministry. He denounced the American war and the corrupt influence of the crown with extreme violence, but he refused to throw in his lot irrevocably with the party of the opposition, and shortly before the fall of North he publicly declared that he could not expect to bear a part in the coming ministry, as he 'would never accept a subordinate position.' The

words are said to have escaped from him in the heat of the debate, and the House was startled and a little amused at the arrogance of a young man who was not twenty-three, who was absolutely without official experience, and who had been little more than a year in parliament, declaring that he would accept no office except in the Cabinet.

But Pitt had attained a position that placed him far above lasting ridicule. Fox spoke of him as already one of the first men in parliament. Burke said of him that he was not a chip of the old block, but the old block itself; Horace Walpole wrote that he had shown logical powers that made men doubt whether he might not prove superior even to Fox; and when upon the resignation of North in March 1782 a ministry was formed under the leadership of Rockingham, combining the two sections of the opposition, Pitt remembered his pledge and refused several offers, among others the Vice-treasurership of Ireland with a salary of £5000 a year. He gave, however, a general and cordial support to the new ministers, but he at the same time brought forward the question of parliamentary reform, on which they were profoundly divided. It was a question which fell naturally to him, for his father had been one of the first to urge it. On the 7th May he moved, in a speech of great brilliancy, for a select committee to inquire into the state of the representation, and was only defeated by 161 to 141. He soon afterwards supported a measure of Sawbridge for shortening the duration of parliament, and a measure of Lord Mahon for preventing bribery at elections.

A close personal and political connection about this time grew up between Pitt and Henry Dundas, who had been Lord Advocate under North. It proved of great importance to the career of Pitt. Dundas had none of the intellectual brilliancy or of the moral dignity of the younger statesman, but he had one of the best political judgments of his time, he had great talents both for business and for debate, and he was a most shrewd and sagacious judge of the characters of men—a gift in which Pitt through his whole life was somewhat wanting.

The Rockingham ministry lasted only for three months. The king detested it; it was from the first profoundly divided, and a bitter personal and political animosity had broken out between Charles Fox and Lord Shelburne, its two most conspicuous members. On 1st July 1782 Lord Rockingham died, and the question of leadership at once broke

up the party. Fox insisted on the leadership of the Duke of Portland, a wealthy and respectable, but perfectly undistinguished nobleman, who was then Lord-lieutenant of Ireland. The king gave the post of First Lord of the Treasury to Shelburne, who had an incomparably higher political position, and who had been a favourite friend and colleague of Chatham, though there were features in his character that already excited great unpopularity and distrust. Fox, with a considerable section of the Rockingham Whigs, at once resigned, and Pitt entered the Cabinet as Chancellor of the Exchequer in the reconstructed ministry. Public opinion generally blamed Fox, and one of the consequences of his resignation was that the House of Commons was divided into three distinct parties. There was the party of Fox, the party of North, and the party of the government, and no one of them could command a clear majority. A coalition of some kind was inevitable. Shelburne leaned towards an alliance with North, but Pitt positively refused to have any connection with the statesman whom he deemed responsible for the American war. Peace was not yet attained, but the negotiations which had been pursued by the preceding ministry were steadily pushed on. Provisional articles of peace between England and the United States were signed in November 1782, and preliminary articles with France and Spain in the following January, while a truce was established with Holland, and the first steps were taken towards a very liberal commercial treaty with the United States.

Pitt bore a leading part in the debates in parliament, and his reputation steadily rose, but the Shelburne ministry was weak, divided, and short-lived. The peace following a disastrous war necessarily involved sacrifices that were profoundly unpopular, and the character of Shelburne aggravated the divisions that had already appeared. Several resignations took place, but Pitt stood loyally by his chief, and endeavoured without success to induce Fox to rejoin the ministry. Fox, however, declared that he would never again serve any ministry with Shelburne for its head, and to the astonishment and indignation both of the king and of the country, he united with the very statesman whose expulsion from public power had been for years the main object of his policy, and whom he had repeatedly threatened with impeachment. North, irritated at the ostracism with which he had been threatened, readily entered into the alliance.

Two factious votes of censure directed against the peace were carried through the Commons by majorities of 16 and 17, and on 24th February 1783 Shelburne resigned.

Pitt had displayed the most splendid parliamentary talents in the discussions that preceded the fall of the ministry, and although he could not overthrow the compact weight of parliamentary influence opposed to him, he profoundly moved the country and placed his own position beyond dispute. On the fall of the Shelburne ministry, the king, hoping to escape the yoke of the coalition, implored the young statesman to accept the leadership, and gave him an absolute authority to name his colleagues. It was a dazzling offer, and Pitt was not yet twenty-four, but he already possessed a judgment and a self-restraint which is rarely found at any age in combination with such brilliancy and such courage, and he saw clearly that the moment of triumph had not yet come. After a long struggle and many abortive efforts the king was obliged to yield, and on the 2d April the coalition ministry was formed with the Duke of Portland as First Lord of the Treasury, and Fox and North as joint Secretaries of State.

It commanded a large majority of the votes, and included a great preponderance of the ability in the House of Commons, but the king viewed it with a detestation amounting to loathing, and the nation was profoundly scandalised by the alliance on which it rested. Pitt was offered his old post of Chancellor of the Exchequer, which he peremptorily refused. As leader of the opposition, he brought forward, in the form of resolutions, an elaborate scheme of parliamentary reform, including an increase of the county members. He was defeated by 293 to 149, but he at least succeeded in bringing Fox and North into direct collision. He brought forward another important measure for the reform of abuses in the public offices, which passed the Commons but was rejected in the Lords. The peace which was carried by the new ministry differed very little from that which they had censured when in opposition; and very soon the bill of the government for subverting in some important respects the charter of the East India Company and reorganising the government of India, produced another great change in the disposition of power.

The feature of the scheme which chiefly excited indignation and alarm was the creation by the

existing legislature of a new supreme body in England, consisting of seven commissioners who were to be immovable except by an address from either house for four years, and who were during that period to have an absolute control of the patronage of India. It was contended that this measure would give the party who were now in power an amount of patronage which would enable them to overbalance the influence of the crown, dominate the parliament, and control succeeding administrations. These objections were brought forward by Pitt with great power, but with extreme exaggeration, and the king and the nation were speedily alarmed. The India Bill passed by large majorities through the Commons, but when it came into the House of Lords the king authorised Lord Temple to say that he would consider any man his enemy who voted for the bill. The communication produced an immediate effect. The bill was rejected in the Lords by 95 to 76; the ministry refused to resign, and the House of Commons supported them by large majorities; but the king peremptorily dismissed them on 18th December 1783, and next day it was announced that Pitt had been called to the head of affairs as Chancellor of the Exchequer and First Lord of the Treasury.

Pitt had already abundantly displayed his parliamentary ability, his judgment, and his discretion. He was now to display in the highest degree his courage. In the eyes of nearly all the best judges in England his position was a hopeless one, and his administration was likely to be even more brief than the three which had preceded it. There was a majority of more than a hundred against him in the Commons, and the parliamentary influence behind it was so great that an immediate dissolution must have been disastrous. He was called to office by a grossly unconstitutional interference on the part of the king, and every day which he remained in office under the censure of the House of Commons added to the falseness of his position. Temple, on whom he had greatly relied, threw up the seals of Secretary of State which he had accepted, and in the House of Commons Pitt was himself at this time the only cabinet minister, while Dundas was the only considerable debater who supported him against the united attacks of North, Fox, Burke, and Sheridan. But Pitt fought his battle with a skill and a resolution that have never been surpassed in parliamentary history.

A long succession of hostile votes was carried, but they failed to drive him from office, and soon unequivocal signs appeared that the country was with him. The magnanimity with which at this critical period he refused to take for himself a great sinecure office which fell vacant added greatly to his popularity. Addresses in his favour poured in from all the leading corporations in the country. The majorities against him grew steadily smaller. At last, on 25th March 1784, the long-deferred blow was struck. Parliament was dissolved, and an election ensued which swept away nearly 160 members of the opposition, made Pitt one of the most powerful ministers in all English history, and prepared the way for a ministry which lasted, with a few months' intermission, for no less than twenty years.

In this great and powerful ministry English political life assumed much of its modern aspect. The House of Commons acquired a new importance in the constitution, the people a new control over its proceedings, and the First Lord of the Treasury complete ascendency in the government. The system of 'king's friends' controlling the ministry was finally destroyed, and when the chancellor, Lord Thurlow, attempted to perpetuate it, he was peremptorily dismissed. The skilful management of the regency question established the right of parliament to provide for the exercise of supreme power during the incapacity of the king. Direct parliamentary corruption was finally put down. Great numbers of sinecure places were abolished, and great reforms were introduced into the system of collecting the revenue and issuing public loans. The government of India was reorganised on the system of a double government, which continued with little change till the abolition of the East India Company in 1858. The whole system of taxation and of trade duties was thoroughly revised, and no minister since Walpole had approached Pitt in his complete competence in dealing with trade questions. The finances of the country, which had been extremely disorganised by the American war, became once more flourishing. A commercial treaty, based upon more enlightened commercial doctrines than any English statesman, except Shelburne, had yet adopted, was negotiated with France. In foreign politics Pitt was for some years equally successful. Some troubles that had arisen with Spain were put down by a display of prompt and judicious firmness. In conjunction with

Prussia a revolutionary movement in Holland which was fomented by French influence was suppressed, and the triple alliance of England, Prussia, and Holland contributed largely to terminate the wars between Sweden and Denmark and between the emperor and the Turks, though it met with a mortifying failure in its dealings with Russia. Pitt's love of peace was very sincere, but the influence of England in European councils rose greatly under his ministry, and he showed much decision and tact in extricating England from a dangerous complicity with the ambitious designs of her Prussian ally. Up to the time of the French Revolution there was no decline in his ascendency, his popularity, or his success.

A few adverse criticisms, however, may be justly made. He cast aside too lightly on the first serious opposition parliamentary reform and the abolition of the slave-trade, and it became evident to good observers that he cared more for power than for measures, and was ready to sacrifice great causes with which he had sincerely sympathised and which he might have carried, rather than raise an opposition that might imperil his ascendency. His once famous Sinking Fund is now universally recognised to have been thoroughly vicious in its principle; and in the latter part of his career it led him to the absurdity of borrowing largely at high interest in order to pay off a debt that had been contracted at low interest. His attempt to establish free trade between England and Ireland failed through an explosion of manufacturing jealousy in England, which obliged him to modify his original propositions in a way which was unpalatable to the Irish. More real blame attaches to him for his opposition to all serious measures to remedy the enormous abuses in the Irish parliament and for the great uncertainty of his policy towards the Irish Catholics. The great evils which grew up in England in his time in connection with the sudden development of the factory system appear never to have attracted his attention, and he made no effort to mitigate them. He created peerages with extreme lavishness and with very little regard to merit, and although his patronage was not positively corrupt, few ministers have shown themselves more indifferent to the higher interests of literature, science, and art.

When the French Revolution broke out his policy was one of absolute neutrality towards the contending parties, and this neutrality he most

faithfully observed. He wholly failed, however, to understand the character and the supreme importance of the Revolution. He believed that it was merely a passing disturbance, and that its principal effect would be to deprive France for some years of all serious influence in European affairs, and almost to the eve of the great war he was reducing the armaments of England. There is no real doubt that he was forced most reluctantly into war by the aggressive policy of France in Flanders and towards Holland; but he drew the sword believing that France was so disorganised and bankrupt that a struggle with her would be both short and easy; he was almost wholly destitute of the kind of talents that are needed for a war-minister, and he had to contend with an almost unexampled outburst of military enthusiasm, and soon after with the transcendent genius of Napoleon. His belief in the probable shortness of the war and in the efficacy of his sinking fund, led him into the great error of raising his war expenses in the first stages of the war almost wholly by loans, and thus laying the foundation of an enormous increase of debt. His military enterprises were badly planned and badly executed, and he had none of his father's skill in discovering and bringing forward military talent. For some years it is true his ascendency in parliament continued to increase. The great Whig schism of 1794 and the secession of Fox reduced the opposition to utter insignificance. But even in his domestic measures Pitt was no longer fortunate. Through fear of the revolutionary spirit which had infected some portions of the population, he was led into repressive measures very little in harmony with his earlier career. Corn had risen to famine price, and great distress prevailed, and the government attempted to meet it by very ill-conceived relaxations of the poor-laws—by levying rates for the purpose of increasing wages, and by granting parochial relief in proportion to the number of children in a family, and thus offering a direct premium to improvident marriages. In Ireland disaffection was steadily growing, and Pitt tried to win the Catholics by measures of conciliation, and especially by the concession of the suffrage; but the opposition of the king, divided councils, and the vacillation of his own mind impaired his policy, and the injudicious recall at a very critical moment of a popular viceroy contributed largely to the savage rebellion of 1798. He then

tried to place Irish affairs on a sound basis by a legislative union which was to be followed by Catholic emancipation, the payment of the priests, and a commutation of tithes. The first measure was carried by very corrupt means, but the king, who had not been informed of the ultimate intentions of his minister, declared himself inexorably opposed to Catholic emancipation, which he deemed inconsistent with his coronation oath. Pitt resigned his office into the hands of his follower Addington in February 1801; but a month later, on hearing that the agitation of the Catholic question had for a time overthrown the tottering intellect of the king, he declared that he would abandon the Catholic question during the remainder of the reign, and he resumed office in May 1804 on the understanding that he would not suffer it to be carried. His last ministry was a melancholy and a humiliating one. The war, which had been suspended by the peace of Amiens, had broken out with renewed vehemence. There was great danger of invasion, and Pitt earnestly desired to combine the most eminent men of all parties in the ministry; but the king forbade the admission of Fox. The principal followers of Fox refused to join without their chief, and Lord Grenville and his followers took the same course. Grenville, who had long been one of Pitt's ablest colleagues, was now completely alienated. A junction with Addington was effected, but it lasted only for a short time, and it added little to the strength of the ministry. Dundas, Pitt's oldest friend and colleague, had been lately made Viscount Melville. He was placed at the head of the Admiralty; but a charge of misappropriating public funds was raised against him, and in 1805 he was driven ignominiously from office. Pitt's own health was now broken. His spirits had sunk; the spell which had once surrounded him had in a great degree passed away, and although the victory of Trafalgar saved England from all immediate danger of invasion, the disasters of Ulm and Austerlitz threw a dark cloud over his closing scene. He died in his forty-seventh year on 23d January 1806. The House of Commons by a great majority voted him a public funeral and a monument in Westminster Abbey.

He was never married, and he never mixed much in general society; but in all his private relations he was pure, amiable, simple, and attractive. He was a warm friend. His temper was very equable,

and till near the close of his life very cheerful. He had much ready wit, and he could easily throw off the cares of office, and even join heartily in the games of boys. He maintained to the last his familiarity with the classics, but his serious interests were exclusively political. He only once crossed the Channel, and he appears to have been wholly untouched by the great contemporary currents of literature and non-political thought. He was not free from the prevailing vice of hard drinking, and he has been justly blamed for having allowed his great indifference to money to degenerate into a culpable carelessness. In 1801 some of his friends subscribed £12,000 towards the payment of his debts, and in the following year he sold Holwood, his country place. But these measures proved wholly insufficient. With no extravagant tastes, with no family to support, with no expensive elections, and with an official income of at least £10,000 a year, he left £40,000 of debt, which was paid by the nation. In public he was cold and repellent, and there was something theatrical in the unvaried dignity of his demeanour; but few men possessed to a higher degree the power of commanding, directing, and controlling, and he inspired the nation with an unbounded confidence both in his character and in his abilities. England has seen no greater parliamentary leader, few greater masters of financial and commercial legislation, and he was one of the first statesmen to adopt the teaching of Adam Smith. If his eloquence was very diffuse, if it showed little imagination, or depth or originality of thought, it was at least supremely adapted to all the purposes of debate, and it rarely failed in its effect. He was, in a word, a great peace-minister; but in the latter part of his life an evil fate brought him face to face with problems which he never wholly understood and with difficulties which he was very little fitted to encounter.

His political life has been written in much detail by Tomline and by Gifford; but by far the fullest and best biography of him which has yet appeared is that of Lord Stanhope. Lord Macaulay has made him the subject of a well-known biographical essay, and Mr Goldwin Smith of two brilliant lectures, and the reader may consult with profit the recent monograph of Mr Walford. The career of Pitt, however, is indissolubly intertwined with the whole English history of his time, and it is in connection with that history that it may be best studied.